

- A publication of MCC U.S. Committees on Women's Concerns
- March–April 1998
- Report No. 137

Women doing peacemaking

I grew up in a Mennonite home and attended Mennonite schools. In the context of this subculture my commitment to pacifism was more assumed than tested. However, in my senior year of college, I began to struggle with putting my pacifist ideals into reality. I participated in a few peace vigils, bought second hand clothes and recycled yet I didn't feel like I was "making peace." I have continued to struggle with what it means to make peace through eight years of restorative justice and mediation work.

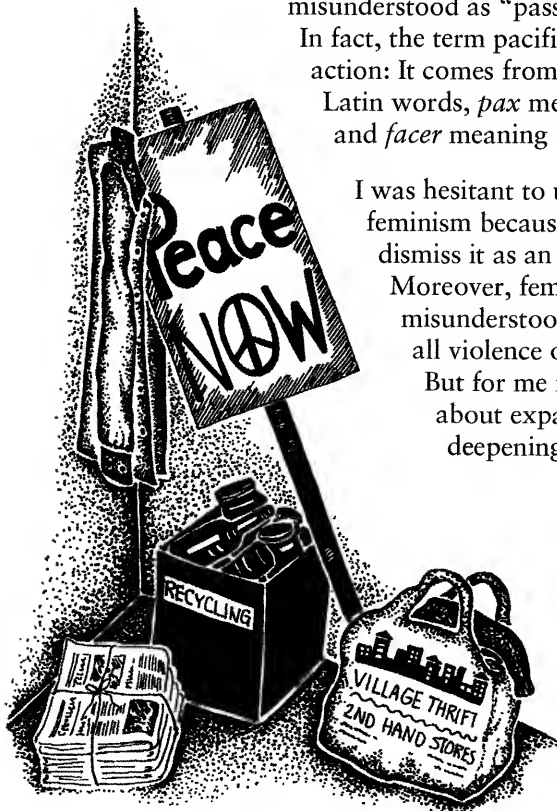
When I was asked to compile this *Women's Concerns Report* on the theme of "pacifism and feminism," I realized that I felt uncomfortable with using those terms. For many people pacifism suggests non-involvement with the violence in one's neighborhood and world. It implies being a doormat. Pacifism, in other words, is popularly misunderstood as "passive-ism."

In fact, the term pacifism implies action: It comes from two Latin words, *pax* meaning "peace" and *facer* meaning "to make."

I was hesitant to use the term feminism because many people dismiss it as an ideology.

Moreover, feminism is often misunderstood as blaming all violence on patriarchy.

But for me feminism is about expanding and deepening the analysis



of violence, including violence against women. We are all culpable in violent systems; from blatant injustice to demeaning words, from the internalized violence of bulimia to the subtle violence of sexism that falls on women like acid rain. Violence is always the result of the uneven distribution of power across gender, race and class lines.

In compiling this issue I made the decision to downplay the terms "pacifism" and "feminism" and focus instead on practical stories of women doing peacemaking. This decision flows from my feminist commitment to unsilencing women's stories. These stories describe ordinary women using their strength, wit and character as peace-making tools. These women express both intuition and conviction, compassion and endurance.

Lily Bell's story (told by Janet Regier) is about overcoming the violence of severe abuse from family members, drugs, alcohol and abandonment—all reflections of the underlying violence of racism and the struggle for Native identity. Hedy Sawadzky describes peacemaking as presence, reporting and prayer in a Christian Peacemaker Team's violence reduction initiative in Hebron. Roxanne Harvin Claassen relates how she puts her peacemaking theology into practice in the classroom by using cooperative structures and mediation to handle discipline problems. Sue Frankel-Streit insists that poverty is the violent underbelly of an oppressive military and economic system. Tammy Sutherland contends that women need to become strong and assertive as a constituent part of a commitment to nonviolence. Jean Janzen's poetry reminds us of the fragile texture of violence and hope in human lives and history.

These stories bear witness to the long tradition of women as active peacemakers amidst the violence and oppression of everyday life; they suggest that feminism and pacifism find fulfillment in each other. Pacifism at its best is feminist, and feminism at its best is pacifist.

—Elaine Enns, compiler

Elaine Enns is from Saskatoon, Sask. She came to Fresno, Calif. in 1989 for a Mennonite Voluntary Service assignment with the Victim Offender Reconciliation Program. She is on the faculty of the Center for Peacemaking and Conflict Studies at Fresno Pacific University.

"Talking about that part of my life helps me with life as a mother today. I wish I could remember more."

WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT
USPS 367-790 is published bi-monthly
by MCC U.S. Women's Concerns,
Box 500, 21 South 12th St., Akron,
PA 17501-0500, fax 717-859-3875;
and by MCC Canada Women's
Concerns, 50 Kent Avenue, Kitchener,
ON N2G 3R1; fax 519-745-0064.
Periodicals postage paid at Akron, PA.
POSTMASTER: Please send address
changes to Report, P.O. Box 500,
Akron, PA 17501-0500.

by Janet Regier and Lily Bell

Lily's story: A journey of peacemaking

Lily Bell's story begins a few years before she was born. In the early 1960s there were two groups of Native people living on the coast of British Columbia, Canada. Both were forced to resettle and live together on a reserve on the northern tip of Vancouver Island (Port Hardy). The people traveled to their destination by boat expecting to find adequate housing. Three completed homes awaited the 14 families that relocated. At this point, some of the people returned to their homes on the mainland only to find them looted and burned to the ground. And so they had no choice, they returned to their new "home" and were forced to spend the winter in boats. The community was thrown into a situation of alcoholism and total despair. Lily's story begins in this community.

I began my journey in this world on March 15, 1964. My name is Lily Mary Faith Bell. My Indian name is Milidzas. I am the first daughter of Harold "Harry" James Bell, Mamalelegala (Village Island), British Columbia, and Dorothy "Dot" Ann Henry, Tsawataeneuk (Kingcome Inlet), British Columbia. I have often wondered what it would be like to write about my life story. I have only shared it with some very special people in my life. I feel that talking about that part of my life helps me with life as a mother today. I wish I could remember more.

I had a fairly rugged life, especially my early years. I didn't realize until age 6 or 7 who my mom was, where she was, or why she wasn't fulfilling her duties as my mother on a daily basis. From 3 or 4 years old I was raised by my godmother, Dora. Although I was fed, clothed, taught and disciplined, it never felt like we had a mother-daughter relationship. That was something I always yearned for.

Dora meant well in all she did for me, but it was the way she punished me that made me resent her and lose respect for her. She had rheumatoid arthritis and became very dependent on pain pills. With those pills she would change her attitude in a flash! In addition to this, I was experiencing severe sexual abuse. I had been abused by many predators 90 percent of whom were my so-called relatives. I felt like a "target" and responsible for their actions. As I got older I began to run away from home from time to time. When I was 11 years old, Dora's sister decided to get me out of a bad situation. My running away from home was becoming more frequent, and I was experimenting with alcohol and sniffing glue and gas. I really was turning for the worse.

It was at this age that I experienced a major turn in my life. I was in Alert Bay, British Columbia, enjoying the annual June sports weekend. As I was heading to the soccer field to watch my dad play, I was stopped by a taxi. A lady and a small girl were in it. The woman was looking for my dad so I jumped in to show her the way.

I became numb as she told me that she was my mother! After all those years of "I wish . . . If only . . . I wonder . . . What if? . . ." The next thing I knew, I was on my way to Winnipeg, Manitoba, with my mother and younger sister. Everything I had hoped and prayed for was becoming real. I was so scared and angry.

Initially our agreement was only to try to "rough it out" until the end of summer, but as hard as getting through July and August was, I chose to extend my agreement until the end of one school year. (I discovered years later that as my biological mother she had legally earned the right to have access to me because she had detoxified herself.)

There were many obstacles to overcome in my life in Winnipeg, but it was the feeling of being free of the abuse that made me decide to make my life work. So after "holding my guard up" for about a year-and-a-half I decided to work with my mother instead of against her. I have many fond memories of this time, but I have some bad ones too.

"I became numb as she told me that she was my mother! After all those years of 'I wish ... If only ... I wonder ... What if? ...'"

I didn't know alcoholism was a disease until my mom started drinking again. I learned of her disease through Alateen (a program for teens with alcoholic family members). My sister and I had to accept her drinking whether we liked it or not. My mother would premeditate her binges. She would wait until payday, and before leaving she would hide grub, bus tickets and bread money around the house. Then after several days she'd phone home and send us to her little hiding places. That would cover us until she returned home again. We covered up for her just so we wouldn't be taken away by Children's Aid and put into different foster homes.

Promise after promise was broken, and when I was 16 years old I broke down and gave my mom an ultimatum: She had to give up booze or I would phone Children's Aid because we were starved, dirty and desperate.

I couldn't concentrate in school that day. What was she going to do? I remember getting home and not finding her there. My heart stopped. I was sitting there crying when the phone rang. It was the detox center saying that mom had checked herself in.

She has been sober for 17 years this December! I still recite the Alcoholics Anonymous prayer today because He did grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference!

But, I was still caught in a cycle that only I could break. I had tried smoking, drinking and drugs to hide the pain. I thought I knew what love was and had started abusing that too. I knew I was missing family and needed to find my identity again. It felt embarrassing to be a Native. I was ashamed of wearing Native clothing. I didn't want any Native men for boyfriends and I especially despised my name, Lily Bell.



When I was 21 years old I returned home and started piecing my puzzled life together. I had left Port Hardy as a little girl and come back as an adult. I had a lot of catching up to do.

I fell in love with Fred, the father of my three kids, almost instantly. He has shown me so much love and taught me to be patient, even finding a way to tell me I needed help in order for me to move on with my life. After all, I was around the many individuals who had hurt me as a child.

As I was raising our first child I realized that I had to break the cycle. Fred noticed me talking down to our daughter, Tiffany, repeating the way I had been talked to as a child. I needed support and counseling, and when I finally released all that pain and guilt I started feeling free again.

I always dreamed of being a social worker, but upon arriving back in British Columbia I applied for a job as a teacher's assistant and began working in the school on the reserve where I had grown up.

When our daughter was 5 years old she developed leukemia. I don't think I could have been strong for Tiffany as she battled cancer if I had not dealt with all the pain I was carrying throughout the years. We made each other strong as a family. She is now cancer-free and has the chance to live a full and rich life. I am so thankful for my family today.

I met Lily Bell in August of 1995 when my husband and four children and I traveled from our home near Carlton, Saskatchewan to Port Hardy, British Columbia, for a year of teaching at the Gwa'sala'-Nakwaxda'xw reserve

"I had left Port Hardy as a little girl and come back as an adult. I had a lot of catching up to do."

"On one afternoon two CPT members were physically assaulted by irate settlers. Discipleship can be costly."

school. As a teaching assistant in my classroom, Lily impressed me in the way she related to the children.

Lily fosters healthy communication skills among the children in her classrooms. She cries and anguishes over the use of drugs and alcohol in her community and speaks out to children and adults. Some of the school children have as troubled a life as she had. She talks to them about their pain. If they are acting out she gently confronts them, asking: "So what is happening at home? What is bothering you? Why are you acting this way?" She challenges the children, even at ages 8 and 9, to take responsibility for their actions, and not to let their past give them an excuse to misbehave. "Only you can choose to change your ways," she often says.

When asked about confronting those who wronged her in the past, she says there is no more room for violence. "I believe God will take care of everything," Lily says, "What goes around comes around."

What does this peacemaker think is important to the Native community? "To me it's what is passed on to you. I'm proud of what I am in spite of my experiences. They have made me stronger. What is important for us as a people is to get back to the traditional ways—Indian medicines, Indian foods. Nobody should starve who has the land and the sea—seals, clams, berries."

Lily Bell's family has expanded to include a son, Frederick and a baby daughter, Jean. Janet Regier is a member of the Tiefen-grund Rosenort Mennonite Church, in Laird, Sask. She is a teacher in the Saskatchewan Valley School Division. Every seven years her family takes a sabbatical leaving their farm to live for a year in a different land. Janet is the mother of four, a sheep farmer and an avid gardener.

by Hedy M. Sawadsky

Women in the way

The phone message August 14, 1995, shook me to the core.

"We'd like you to go join the Christian Peacemaker Team in Hebron, West Bank, for two months. Carmen and Wendy just sent a second urgent invitation."

A few days earlier I had returned from a wonderful but exhausting time on the east coast, lamenting the 50th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Besides, my 65th birthday had just been celebrated. Was I really up for yet another venture that could be demanding?

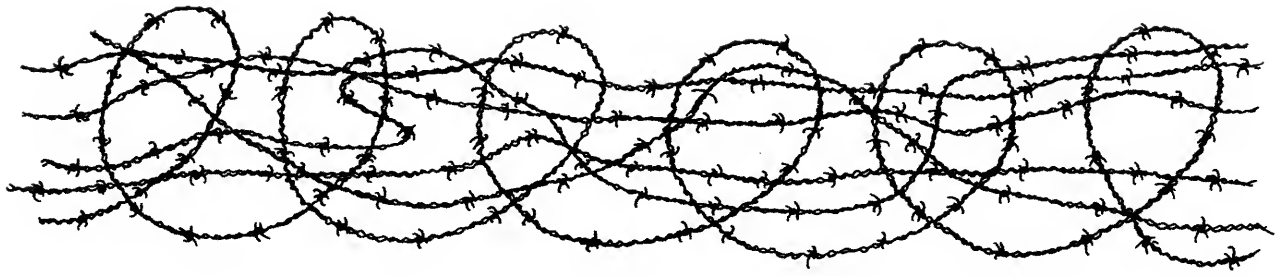
The decision whether or not to go became central in my prayer journal and in consultations. Slowly, instinctively, I sensed, yes, this was God's *kairos* timing.

Three weeks later Kathy Kern and I were walking into Hebron. "Are you ready to be tried by fire," she asked as we moved through the vegetable market in the congested street.

That question had a familiar ring. My baptism test at age 18 referred to "walking through fire" (Isaiah 43:1, 2). It was a query that subtly undergirded all of our nonviolent Christ-centered witness in that volatile "Holy Land."

What does it mean to be part of a violence reduction initiative in Hebron? Perhaps the deeper question is, what is it like for children, women and men to live under occupation? To endure for decades hardships of all kinds, indignities, closures, strikes, deportations, harassment, shootings, killings, imprisonment, high unemployment, demolished homes.

And how do aspiring peacemakers respond? The short answer is by prayerful presence, courageous intervention, all supported by loving communities. Stated simply, it's "being in the way" between Palestinians and Israelis.



My first day of 40 “in the wilderness” included morning prayers at the Abrahamic mosque; drinking tea in the orchard of an extended family now living in tents because their home had just been demolished; and visiting the ancient Oak of Mamre—a reminder that Abraham was indeed the ancestor of both Isaac and Ishmael.

A rather different scenario unfolded early in the new school year. Christian Peacemaker Team members were alerted that there was “trouble” at a nearby elementary girls’ school. The violence included garbage at the entrances, graffiti on doors, blaring music, flag burnings and even tear gassing, so that children had to be treated in hospital. Israeli settlers justified their aggressive actions by claiming the city as their own.

How to respond? We discerned that our role was presence and action as necessary. For days we, as well as Palestinians and Israelis from Jerusalem, were visible at the Cordoba school. We were talking, praying, reporting—helping to unmask the evil (Ephesians 5:11) and prevent further harassment of innocent children. One female settler, a ringleader, became the continual focus of our intercessions.

Another time, as we accompanied detained Palestinians to a government complex, much time was spent simply waiting. How to engage the Hebrew-speaking Israeli soldiers? Recalling the word *ruach* (breath, wind, Spirit of God in Genesis 1), I engaged a young man in dialogue. Did he glimpse the truth that God’s *ruach* is also in the enemy?

Being pioneer Christian Peacemaker Team (CPT) members in Hebron, upon invitation of the mayor, meant living as a team and sharing rather primitive conditions. How grateful we were for a tiny stove to boil water for tea, as we enjoyed famous Hebron grapes with our pita bread.

One necessity was the portable phone, keeping us in immediate touch with journalists and tragic happenings to which we promptly responded. For example, one cold afternoon two older Palestinian women were kept stranded behind barbed wire for hours. Three of us arrived and when told to leave the checkpoint we responded “in character”: Dianne immediately seated herself next to the wire as close to the women as possible, Wendy called the

authorities for assistance and action on her cordless, I embraced 5-year-old Wisam who was traumatized because she couldn’t reach her mother. Wendy’s call resulted in the freeing of the women who had been badly shaken and bruised by stones that had been thrown at them. We accompanied them to their home, reported details, remaining in solidarity and feeling the indignities they had experienced to body and spirit.

Participating in nonviolent direct action is risky. Our trust in God was often mingled with fear. For example often during our Saturday vigils on Dubboya Street in the heart of the city, settlers, some armed, would stream by Palestinian homes, creating a tense, highly-charged atmosphere. Again we documented what we saw and heard, talking to all parties. On one afternoon two CPT members were physically assaulted by irate settlers. Discipleship can be costly.

One of the most rewarding aspects of peacemaking in Hebron is the increasing participation by Israelis themselves. A 30 day Lenten fast (March 1997) protesting the continuing demolition of hundreds of Palestinian homes drew strong participation by Palestinians, Israelis and internationals. Harriet, who was from a Kibbutz, joined the fast for 13 days. While in Hebron she witnessed the tragedy of a home demolition. Now she and others are launching a unique initiative, sponsored by a coalition of Israeli groups: *Gush Shalom*, Peace Now, Rabbis for Human Rights, and *Bet Shalom*, as well as Israelis and Palestinians for Nonviolence. They developed the Ad Hoc Committee against Home Demolition. (Copies of a similar North American action alert are available from CPT, P.O. Box 6508, Chicago, IL 60680; 312-455-1199; fax 312-666-2677; cpt@igc.org)

In addition to the scenarios listed above, the nonviolent presence in Hebron has included drinking innumerable cups of sweet tea and Arabic coffee; teaching nonviolence; engaging queries from Muslims about Christ; rebuilding homes; removing barriers in markets; e-mailing reports and urgent action requests to North America; standing with university students; as well as paying the price of risky advocacy by being maligned, detained and even barred from entering the country.

continued on page 6

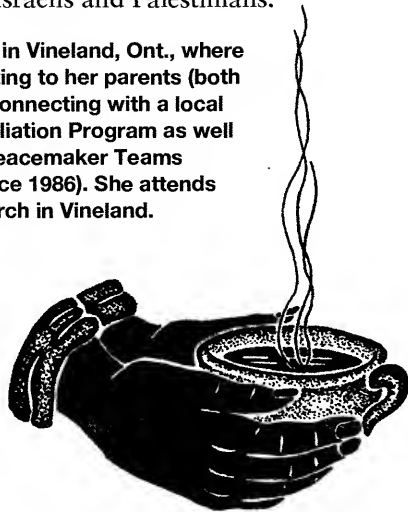
CPT did not invent the witness of "Being in the Way." Women and men have, by God's wisdom and grace, engaged the powers nonviolently since the days of the midwives in Exodus 1 and 2. One is awed by Queens Vashti and Esther, by the women at Christ's cross and tomb, who have, along with countless others in the Bible, in Anabaptism and in history, ennobled the path of courageous witness through the centuries.

I am deeply appreciative for the cloud of witnesses who went beyond raised consciousness and acted on their Christ-centered insights and beliefs, many refusing to support militarism and war.

I am thankful for Mennonite Central Committee's impact on my life, beginning in the 1920s when my parents were "rescued" in Russia.

These are some of the influences that have led me to try to serve hot chocolate to "protectors" of nuclear weapons in Amarillo, Texas and to serve kosher coffee to Israeli soldiers in Beit Sahour near Bethlehem while walking for a peaceful future for Israelis and Palestinians.

Hedy M. Sawadsky lives in Vineland, Ont., where her calling includes relating to her parents (both vigorous at 94 and 96), connecting with a local Victim Offender Reconciliation Program as well as MCC and Christian Peacemaker Teams Steering Committee (since 1986). She attends the First Mennonite Church in Vineland.



poems by Jean Janzen



Temperature of Cruelty

We think of the beaten baby dead against the darkening stain on the bed, soldiers pulling out fingernails, the prisoner dangling for days. But also the years of bitterness in a family, the cold turning of the shoulder, the look that erases you. What is the temperature of cruelty? Fire? Boiling oil? Or the great weight of ice, gravel shearing rock in a slow grind. Or the April frost, so lacy and beautiful, whispering and biting the orchard to death in one slow night, when all the blossoms blacken, and all that was possible withers and shatters in the wind.



Eating Stones

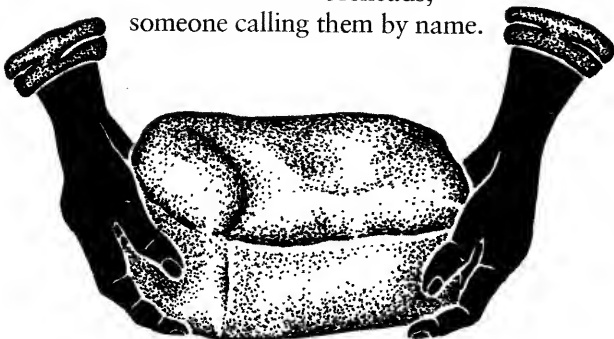
*for my aunts who died in the
Ukrainian famine in the 1930s*

Hunger with its open face,
its open mouth. Simple
as a life-line. I love
the old man's story—
the miracle in the Ukraine—
how that loaf of bread slid off
the military wagon into the snow
and saved his whole family.
Survival and escape from
the unspeakable desert.

One loaf.

When the tramp sat on my
childhood backsteps, hunger
seemed to rub its rags
against the edges of adventure.
The small dramas of the Depression,
my mother exclaiming and clapping
her hands as we opened the huge
round of government cheese.
All of us unaware,
the mute murders so far away.

I want
history to veer in their behalf,
not that wilderness of stones
with its refusals. Susie, Helen
and Marie, orphaned, young,
and beautiful, emaciated
on the pitiful bedding, their mouths
bloody with effort. I want
for them the transformation
into loaves. And then, those
other necessities we live by:
a hand on their foreheads,
someone calling them by name.



Red

The television blooms with fires
in the cities, gunshots, roses

scattered on a kitchen floor.
Two small children and my belly

swollen with another. The summer sun
fills my uterus with radiance;

so much love and violence, the world
gone red. I open my mouth

Like a rose, lay it on the small
foreheads. I wrap my voice

around them, but the syllables
are like a wire fence,

and not one word prevents
the sun or fire.

Jean Janzen is a poet living
in Fresno, Calif. She teaches
poetry writing at Fresno
Pacific University and Eastern
Mennonite University. She is
a member of College Commu-
nity Mennonite Brethren
Church in Fresno.

"As others saw the difference in the climate of my classroom, they wanted to know what I was doing and how I was doing it."

"John apologized for the disrupting and said he wanted to stop. I apologized for embarrassing him by my response."


by Roxanne Harvin Claassen

Peacemaking in the classroom: Showing and telling

I am a teacher. When I began teaching, I decided that I wanted to put my peacemaking theology into practice in my classroom. I use a strategy that never ignores bad behavior and encourages a cooperative process. It assumes that when there is bad behavior, there is an opportunity for some teaching and learning for all involved in the conflict (including me, the teacher).

As others saw the difference in the climate of my classroom, they wanted to know what I was doing and how I was doing it so they could do it too. As a result I also coordinate a peer mediation program in which students help students solve conflicts, and I am helping lead our school in the direction of implementing a program of discipline that is called Discipline that Restores.

I teach eighth grade at Raisin City Elementary School. I have also taught first grade, fourth/fifth grade multi-age, and sixth/seventh/eighth grade multi-age. This has put me in an incredible position to use what I know about peacemaking every day.

Peacemaking has transformed and empowered me, and I am seeing it transform and empower others. This has not happened overnight. Becoming a peacemaker and one who can teach others to be peacemakers is a long process starting with a commitment, a decision to be constructive with all of my students and all others with whom I am in relationship. It involves sharing openly with others this commitment and the structures/strategies needed to make it a reality.

Here is just one story of transformation and empowerment that was the result of being deliberate about being a peacemaker. John was known for being disruptive and unable or unwilling to control himself in the classroom and with other students. He is now an eighth grader, and I have the opportunity to relate to him.

I let John and my other students know that if we have a problem, I want to use cooperative strategies to work with them on our problems. This means that I will invite students into a process that will give each of us the power to resolve our conflict constructively and in a way that we all feel good about.

John gave me the opportunity to do this very soon. He began disrupting the class while I was giving them input that they would need in order to continue learning a particular concept. I let John know we had a problem and asked him if he would be willing to sit down with me to talk about the problem and to figure out ways together to solve it. He was willing. We set a time and a place to meet. This in itself helped him control himself more until that meeting.

We both agreed to some ground rules. These included following the peacemaking process, saying if the process seems unfair, being willing to describe what happened, and being willing to summarize for each other.

I went first in describing how I was experiencing the conflict. I told him that I was afraid he would not learn and he would keep the others from learning if he was talking and disrupting during time that needed to be used for learning. This gave him the chance to listen to the rationale behind the rules and expectations we had, as a class, worked on and agreed to together. When he was able to repeat accurately what he heard me say, I knew he was getting the chance to gain better understanding that might lead in the direction of new decisions about his behavior.

John also described how he experienced the conflict. He was not intending to upset me, but he did like to entertain his friends. He enjoyed making his friends laugh and felt more accepted by them when he did this during class. He also said that sometimes he wasn't aware when he started his entertaining mode. I listened and let him know that I understood what he was saying by repeating this back to him.



We were now ready to move into the next part of the process: figuring out how to make things right between us now and how to prevent the problem from happening in the future. We used the new information we both had from listening to each other to begin solving the problem. John apologized for the disrupting and said he wanted to stop. I apologized for embarrassing him by my response.

We looked at the class rules we had all agreed to follow, and he renewed his commitment to following them. We worked out a plan for me to signal him if he forgot and went into his disrupting routine. We then discussed how he could entertain us at appropriate times, but he decided he really did not want to arrange a formal time to be entertaining, he preferred to find appropriate time in other settings himself. We wrote up our agreement, signed it, set a follow-up date and celebrated our willingness to work together.

The disruption decreased immediately. John was empowered to be in control of himself. This transformed him from being a problem student to being a contributing student.

As stories like this have happened over and over, our school has decided to be deliberate about enabling them to happen by incorporating peacemaking into our discipline plan so all of us can have the opportunity to understand one another better, and to use moments of conflict/misconduct as opportunities to teach and learn. I think Sonya, one of our dedicated peer mediators, recently summed it up very nicely. A visitor from the Congo who had come to observe what we do at Raisin City asked what Sonya would do as a mediator if someone refused to cooperate. She said she would simply tell the person that they would then have to let the dean of students know about the problem so the problem could be solved even if they were unwilling to solve it cooperatively. Sonya then added that when people solved conflict cooperatively, they were less upset and much happier with the resolution.

"Ironically, I have had students say they want time to decide if they want to enter the peacemaking process because then they'll have to take 'responsibility' and they might rather just have a punishment."

"In fact," she said, "getting a punishment usually made the problem between two people worse instead of better, while mediating instead of punishing actually solved the problem and made things better." Ironically, I have had students say

they want time to decide if they want to enter the peacemaking process because then they'll have to take "responsibility" and they might rather just have a punishment.

Peacemaking is not only good theology; it works. It makes a safer and more just climate for all of us. Putting peacemaking theology into practice in my classroom has been one of the most important decisions I have made as a teacher. It has been good because it does not ignore bad behavior and it uses a cooperative process which leads to our being able to figure out together what needs to be learned, changed, and agreed to. Our peer mediation program and our Discipline that Restores program give all of us the tools we need to be responsible people who are in control of ourselves rather than just reacting to and allowing others to control us. Peacemaking is also empowering.

Roxanne Harvin Claassen is currently the eighth grade teacher at the elementary school in Raisin City, Calif. She co-authored a training book, *Making Things Right*, with 32 activities that teach conflict resolution and mediation skills. Roxanne has trained more than a hundred teachers to initiate and administrate student mediation programs in their schools. Roxanne is a member of Mennonite Community Church, in Fresno, Calif.

"I quickly learned that my attempts at voluntary poverty would never make me as poor as most of the women who came to our community for shelter."

"The relationships I have with women who are marginalized and hurt by the system grow ever more honest and natural, and through them I continue to be humbled, challenged and brought ever closer to God, who throughout history has been manifest in 'the least of these.' "

by Sue Frankel-Streit

Resisting the violence of poverty

When I first joined the Catholic Worker 10 years ago, I was new to Catholicism, new to Christianity, and looking for a way to do what I thought the saints did—rid myself of the ways of the world in order to get close to God. A big part of this for me was trying to become "poor"—giving away my money and possessions and letting go of my own agenda. At the Dorothy Day house I quickly learned that my attempts at voluntary poverty would never make me as poor as most of the women who came to our community for shelter. My life experience had been one of privilege; I had received most of the benefits offered by a system that exploited and beat down the women I have come to know as sisters and friends. As I entered into the lives of these women and their children, I began to feel a great rage at how hard their lives were. I saw the reality of Gandhi's statement, "Poverty is the worst form of violence."

It also became quite clear to me, living in Washington, D.C., that the system—governmental, educational, military—was not making things any better. Indeed, the violence of poverty was a reflection of the violence of militarism, of capitalism. How could it be, how can it still be, that women and children are literally sleeping on the streets of the nation's capitol while bombers are housed in high-tech warehouses?

And how am I, as a Christian, as one trying to live in solidarity with people who are involuntarily poor, to respond? For guidance I looked to Scripture. I looked to the great cloud of witnesses, those people whose lives struck me as holy, balanced and honest. I turned to the wisdom of

communal discernment, and as I read the Bible, the Catholic Worker, and the newspaper together with my community, it became clear that part of renouncing the benefits of an unjust system, a system that resisted God's Kingdom, was speaking out against those injustices.

In D.C. there are daily opportunities to do this. I became involved with housing advocacy groups and joined protests against evictions and the closing of shelters. I was arrested for blocking the street in front of the district building, for sitting in front of the Capitol and the White House, and for refusing to leave politicians' offices.

The more I studied the situation, the clearer it became that the daily lives of most of the world's people—and animals, plants, water and air—are controlled by a few powerful institutions. How much money is spent on corporate welfare vs. welfare to poor families? How much is spent on Seawolf submarines vs. schools and clinics? Those numbers made me angry and led me and my husband in 1991–92 to serve a year in jail for a Plowshares action (a nonviolent symbolic direct action) at Griffiss Air Force Base where we hammered and poured blood on a nuclear-capable B-52, 15 days before the Gulf Massacre. But what sends me to the streets, the Pentagon and the submarine base is the pregnant woman I know from the free clinic who doesn't have enough food at home; the 31-year-old mom who would be on the street with her 6-month-old asthmatic baby if not for the generosity of a friend; the five phone calls a day we receive from women and children on the street with no safe place to go.



"They are part of a system in which nuclear weapons are legal and being homeless is a crime."

"If I was committed to defending myself physically, if necessary, could I still be a pacifist? Was I really a Mennonite?"

I could write letters to politicians about these women, or I could send them the facts, but they are part of a system in which nuclear weapons are legal and being homeless is a crime, a system that chooses not to see poor people even when the heating grates they sleep on are within sight of the White House. And so my attempt to move away from the world has led me to put myself "in the way" of the world; to stand in the way and echo the psalmist and the prophets, challenging the principalities and powers to open their eyes.

What good does it do for me to be arrested for speaking out, for standing still, for refusing to move? My actions don't end the sanctions against Iraq, they don't open shelters in D.C. or stop weapons sales. They are, however, or at least I hope that they are, a way of maintaining solidarity with those forced into poverty by the system. For if I do not place myself in direct opposition to the state, it is easy for me to get sucked back into being a passive beneficiary of state violence. This is especially true in this country, where morals, religion and even economics have become so individualized that there is little challenge or incentive to take personal responsibility for the evils of a system, and little leadership in helping us recognize the depth of the violence inflicted on so many by a system that benefits so few.

Stepping away from the life I knew in order to come to know God led me directly to relationships with people suffering from the violence of poverty. The next step, confronting the causes of poverty, seemed only natural. And through the consequences of those confrontations—court, jail, the disapproval of friends—I have come to a deeper sense of solidarity with the poor. Thus, the relationships I have with women who are marginalized and hurt by the system grow ever more honest and natural, and through them I continue to be humbled, challenged and brought ever closer to God, who throughout history has been manifest in "the least of these."

Sue Frankel-Streit has been living at the Dorothy Day Catholic Worker in Washington, D.C., for 10 years. She, her husband and their three children live in community with five to seven other intentional members and five formerly homeless families. They serve a weekly meal on the streets, give out food bags and conduct a weekly vigil at the Pentagon. They are active in organizing actions against militarism, nuclearism, housing shortages and other forms of violence in D.C. and elsewhere.


by Tammy Sutherland

Self-defense: A journey toward nonviolence

I was sitting at my computer when the alert flashed across the monitor: "Please take special safety precautions when moving about at the university and report any suspicious activities promptly." A female student was attacked while jogging on campus this weekend.

Angry and sickened by what I had read, I quickly deleted the message. I was caught off-guard. My recent move from a large urban center to a small town had lulled me into complacency, and I did not want my sense of safety shattered. This woman's story of attack suddenly brought to mind all of my own frightening encounters with men—being harassed on the streets, on the bus, at the public library, at work, on the phone and once physically chased. I have had my share of threatening incidents with men, but no more than most women, I suspect.

A few years ago, my own experiences of harassment, combined with regular news reports of women being attacked, left me feeling extremely vulnerable and terrified. I was afraid to be alone in my own home and out on the streets. I needed to take two night classes at a downtown university in order to finish my bachelor's degree. I so dreaded the bus ride home in the dark that I briefly considered dropping out of university altogether. Determined to graduate, I pressed on, and my partner agreed to meet me at the bus stop near our house whenever he could. Although that helped me deal with my fear, I felt so powerless and dependant—like a child.

This pattern of dependence was taking root in every area of my life, rendering me unable to care for myself in the most basic ways. I felt guilty for "bothering" a waiter to bring me more tea. I lacked the confidence to order a pizza over the phone or ask for directions at a gas station. I never wanted to disturb anyone with my needs. And when it came to dealing with more serious issues, I felt I had no real option but to avoid conflict regardless of the price it would exact on me.

continued on page 12



"Wendo gave me what all the reading, studying and praying could not transmit: the courage to walk alone at night."

Consciously, I embraced feminism. In my gut, however, change was slow. I could critically analyze what I was experiencing in terms of gender-based socialization and power imbalance, but I didn't know how to effect needed changes within myself. How does one go about developing self-esteem, confidence and assertiveness?

Wendo (a feminist form of self-defense, taught by women, for women only) came into my life precisely when I was struggling the most with feeling fearful, weak and out of control. It gave me what all the reading, studying and praying could not transmit: the courage to walk alone at night; the confidence to speak for myself; the self-respect to demand that others treat me with respect. Wendo gave

me an "attitude" which I believe to be an essential survival tool if you are a woman.

Wendo classes are a combination of reflecting on our experiences as women and practicing verbal and physical self-defense techniques. As a group, class members critically re-examine the messages we were taught as girls growing up and thus begin a process of reprogramming our brains. I learned to see myself as strong (physically and otherwise), loud, smart, creative and able to take care of myself—not a "victim waiting to happen." I discovered that I had a right to take up physical and emotional space on this planet. I had a right to say "No!" and say it loudly. I learned how to verbally dissuade an attacker and how to make a fist and render the attacker unconscious if needed. I learned to trust my instincts and my body. I was a changed/changing woman.

About three years prior to this, I had decided to become a Mennonite. I espoused pacifism among other Anabaptist beliefs. Taking a self-defense class therefore raised many questions for me—questions that have been on my mind for the nearly five years since I took this training. I had to be totally committed to defending myself in order for the techniques I had learned to be effective. They had to become second nature. If I was committed to defending myself physically, if necessary, could I still be a pacifist? Was I really a Mennonite?

I looked to Mennonite history for some precedent to guide me. The Mennonite self-defense leagues (*Selbstschutz*) that were set up to fend off the Machno bandits and the Red Army during the Russian revolution were not looked upon favorably by Anabaptists I respected. Was Wendo the same thing? I felt that some of my Mennonite friends disapproved of the fact that I took self-defense training. I began to question whether the lure of violence was entrapping me like it has so many others in this culture. Was I simply taking the weak person's way out?

Lydia Harder, a Mennonite feminist theologian, through her study of the Gospel of Mark, helped me to begin discovering how Wendo could be compatible with the life and teachings of Christ. Mennonites, observed Lydia,

"Women must be empowered before they can be asked to be humble servants."

"I have come to believe that the journey to nonviolence is generally different for women than for men"

tend to skip over the first half of Mark, moving directly into the latter part of the book which focuses on service and submission of oneself to God's will. In the beginning of the Gospel, however, Christ's ministry is that of *empowering* people—healing them, forgiving them, freeing them from the oppressive structures of their day. Christ calls those with power to give it up and become servants. Liberation and empowerment is Christ's call for those without power. Lydia applied these theological insights to the case of feminism. Women must be empowered before they can be asked to be humble servants.

I began to see that before women can sincerely choose to be pacifists, we must first feel our own power and strength. Only after we learn this and are able to walk on our streets with dignity can we take the way of nonviolence. A person cannot be asked to give up what she does not possess.

My definition of pacifism also continued to expand. Pacifism means so much more than simply refraining from all use of violence; it has to do with making justice and confronting oppressive structures in our society. You have to be an incredibly strong, confident person to be able to engage in true nonviolent struggle. In the words of Walter Wink, "One needs to pass through the 'fight' stage, if only to discover one's own inner strength. . . . Only then can such a person freely renounce violence and embrace active nonviolence."¹

Lacking self-esteem and personal power, my ability to be a pacifist, in this deeper sense, was limited. Wendo helped me begin to see myself as a powerful and independent woman—someone who could go anywhere and do anything. It was this new attitude which gave me the potential to truly give my life to service and nonviolent action. It was this attitude that freed me to spend the next three years of my life as an MCC voluntary service worker in the inner city of Winnipeg, just blocks from the university I had once been afraid to attend.

Gandhi believed that personal empowerment needed to precede any commitment to nonviolence. According to him, *Satyagraha* ("truth-force") was embodied when those who practiced it were in a position to use violence effectively but refrained from doing so. Gandhi guarded against attracting to his movement those who feared to

take up arms or felt themselves incapable of resistance. "I do believe," he wrote, "that where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence."²

In speaking of women and nonviolence, "the critical element is choice," say writers Susan French and Lynne Woehrle. A woman trained in self-defense who finds herself in a threatening situation has several options for how to respond, and can therefore experience herself as powerful. They see "nonviolence as a position in the world where we are not victim or victimizer, but instead, strong selves defending our convictions in a way that constantly seeks to minimize harm to others." They go on to suggest that "choosing to stop the oppression of one's self is at its core a nonviolent choice."³

I have come to believe that the journey to nonviolence is generally different for women than for men, and it certainly varies from person to person. French and Woehrle suggest a continuum approach for understanding this process. All who seek to live nonviolently are headed towards the same center, but our paths are unique. I now recognize that self-defense training, rather than being a detour, has been a crucial part of my journey towards pacifism.

Notes

1. Walter Wink. *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992. p.187.
2. Joan Bondurant. *Conquest of Violence*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988. p. 28.
3. Lynne Woehrle and Susan French. "Unlocking the Paradox of Nonviolence and Self-Defense: A Feminist Analysis." Syracuse University, Program on the Analysis and Resolution of Conflicts, draft paper.

Tammy Sutherland is a displaced Canadian living in Harrisonburg, Va. She is an artist, she edits a local peace and justice newspaper, and she enjoys walking other people's dogs. Tammy and her partner, David Dyck, are members of River East Mennonite Brethren Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Women in ministry

Donna Shenk was ordained at Akron (Pa.) Mennonite Church.

Esther Lanting was installed and licensed at Hudson Lake Mennonite Church, New Carlisle, Ind.

Paul and Donna Wiebe were licensed and installed as interim pastors at First Mennonite Church, Iowa City, Iowa.

Herbert and Dorothy Yoder are associate pastors at Lower Deer Creek Mennonite Church, Kalona, Iowa.

Patty Friesen and Patrick Preheim were installed as pastors at Faith Mennonite Church, Minneapolis, Minn.

Jo-Anne Nickel is associate pastor at Mount Royal Church, Saskatoon, Sask.

Meg O'Brien is pastoral intern at Pasadena (Calif.) Church.

Muriel Stackley was ordained as pastor at Berghal Church, Pawnee Rock, Kan.

Betty Lou and Ron Collins were installed as members of the pastoral team at Iglesia del Buen Pastor, Goshen, Ind.

Gwen and Les Gustafson-Zook began a pastorate at Faith Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind.

Book Review

A cloud of witnesses

Women Against the Good War: Conscientious Objection and Gender on the American Homefront, 1941-1947 by Rachel Waltner Goossen (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, NC, and London, 1997, 180 pages)

For the United States, World War II was "the good war." Americans committed themselves to stopping fascism, to freeing countries which had been overrun by Germany and Japan. From 1941 to 1945, the country was engaged on all levels in supporting the war effort. Young men fought in the battles while women and men left at home bought war bonds, worked in factories producing war material, and raised victory gardens. It was "total war" in the sense that the entire society was mobilized for the war effort.

But not all Americans were supporters of the war effort. During the war, more than 12,000 male conscientious objectors, most from the Historic Peace Churches, served in Civilian Public Service as an alternative to military service. Their story has been well-documented. The story of the women who also objected to the war has remained largely untold. Rachel Waltner Goossen tells that story.

Using letters and diaries, oral history interviews, and a questionnaire which she sent to 229 women, Waltner Goossen weaves together stories of individual women with a picture of Civilian Public Service and what it meant to be a conscientious objector during the 1940s. Although there was discussion in 1942 and 1943 about universal conscription, only men were drafted during World War II. There was no official way for women who had pacifist convictions to register this fact.

Women expressed their conscientious objection in a variety of ways. Some, who had husbands or fiancés in CPS camps, relocated to nearby towns. These "camp followers" provided support to the men in the camps, while often struggling to sustain themselves and their children. Unlike men in the armed forces, those in CPS were not paid, and no benefits were available to their dependents. For some women, who saw their role as homemaking and caring for children, this meant moving into the employment market under difficult conditions. Communities were often not welcoming, and wives and children of CPS men faced job discrimination and recriminations from people who resented their opposition to the war. In some ways, these women needed to defend their stance to societal critics more often than did the men, who were often set apart in communal camps.

There were also roles for women to help in the CPS camps, though in limited numbers. Women served as dietitians, planning meals and supervising kitchen crews. Women also served as camp nurses, in a context which pressured them to offer their services to the armed forces. Those who played these roles saw themselves as supporting the men in their conscientious objector stance and as making a statement of their own opposition to the war.

A group of women calling themselves "CO Girls" (COGS), begun at Goshen College in 1943, requested the churches which sponsored CPS to make provision for women to offer service which would express their pacifist stance. These women wished to serve in a parallel way to the male conscientious objectors, though in their interactions with the church leaders who administered CPS they were careful in the way they stated their eagerness to serve. They in effect were calling for change within a patriarchal church system, but did so in a way that did not question that system. From 1943 to 1946, women's units operated as a part of CPS at eight state-run psychiatric institutions. These women served as aides, especially in women's wards. They were considered a part of CPS, though their conditions for service were somewhat different from the men, especially because they were not required to serve under the Selective Service Administration. This pattern paved the way for voluntary service units of men and women which began following the war.

Nanette M. Beyler is assistant campus pastor at Bluffton (Ohio) College.

Susan Janzen is student minister at First Church, Nappanee, Ind.

Susan and Tim Gotwals Lehman were installed as pastors at Jubilee Church, West Liberty, Ohio.

Florence and Weldon Schloneger are co-pastors at First Church, Beatrice, Neb.

Lori Tiessen Bauman is youth pastor at Chaleswood Church, Winnipeg, Man.

Kathy Giesbrecht is associate pastor at Springstein (Man.) Church.

Jessie and Larry Kehler are interim co-pastors at Altona (Man.) Church.

Doreen and Hugo Neufeld will be co-pastors at Trinity Church, Calgary, Alb., summer, 1998.

Pam Peters-Pries is lay minister at Fort Garry Mennonite Fellowship, Winnipeg, Man.

Candace and Mark Wurtz were installed as youth co-pastors at Rosthern (Sask.) Church.

Wendy Janzen is youth pastor at Leamington (Ont.) United Mennonite Church.

The women whose stories Waltner Goossen tells did not generally question the roles women were given in the society of the 1940s. The roles they played in expressing their conscientious objection to war were those of homemaker/nurturer, supportive partner, and professional—in capacities that were open to women in society at that time such as nurse, dietician, and social worker/caregiver. Like their counterparts who served in the armed forces and war industries, they tended not to question traditional gender roles and expected that following the war they would return to supportive and nurturing roles, often in the home.

At the same time, Waltner Goossen points out that these women were taking initiatives which in many cases moved them out of their home communities and which were attempts to make a statement to the broader society of their position. Their courage in standing up for their beliefs, in ways which often led to censure and difficulty, paved the way for more public roles for women of later generations.

Reading Waltner Goossen's book was an introduction for me to a group of women whose roles have been largely invisible. I gained understanding of the costs of being an objector to a war that the society at large considered good (in contrast to the Vietnam War of my youth). Waltner Goossen weaves together individual women's stories with the larger context, so that I also gained a better picture of Civilian Public Service in the American context. The book introduced me to women who used the space they found themselves in to follow their conscience against war. I am glad for this cloud of witnesses, whose existence I was not previously aware of. Waltner Goossen has done us a service in telling these women's stories. This readable account should be in every church library.

—Reviewed by Judy Zimmerman Herr, Lancaster, Pa.



Women and peacemaking

Bibliography

Claassen, Roxanne and Ron Claassen. *Making Things Right: 32 Activities Teach Conflict Resolution & Mediation Skills*. Fresno, CA: Center for Peacemaking and Conflict Studies, Fresno Pacific University, 1996.

Day, Dorothy. *By Little and by Little: The Selected Writings of Dorothy Day*. New York: Knopf, 1983.

Day, Dorothy. *The Long Loneliness: The Autobiography of Dorothy Day*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981.

Henderson, Michael. *All Her Paths Are Peace: Women Pioneers in Peacemaking*. West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 1994.

McAllister, Pam. *Reweaving the Web of Life: Feminism and Nonviolence*. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1982.

McAllister, Pam. *You Can't Kill the Spirit*. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1988.

McAllister, Pam. *This River of Courage: Generations of Women's Resistance and Action*. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1991.

Peace Pilgrim. *Peace Pilgrim: Her Life and Work in Her Words*. Sante Fe, NM: Ocean Tree Books, 1991.

WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT is published bimonthly by the MCC Committees on Women's Concerns. We believe that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. By sharing information and ideas, the committees strive to promote new relationships and corresponding supporting structures through which women and men can grow toward wholeness and mutuality. Articles and views presented in REPORT do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committees on Women's Concerns.

WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT is edited by Gwen Groff. Layout by Beth Oberholtzer Design.

Subscription cost is \$12 U.S./\$15 Cdn. for one year or \$20 U.S./\$25 Cdn. for two years. Send all subscriptions, correspondence and address changes to Editor, MCC Women's Concerns, P.O. Box 500, Akron, PA 17501-0500; telephone 717-859-3889; fax 717-859-3875. Canadian subscribers may pay in Canadian currency.

This newsletter is printed on recycled paper.

Illustrations in this issue were drawn by Teresa Pankratz of Chicago. Please do not reproduce without permission.

News and verbs

Goshen College seeks applicants for full-time, tenure-track positions in the following areas beginning August, 1998: **voice, woodwinds and social work.**

For more information contact Paul A. Keim, Academic Dean, Goshen College, Goshen, IN 46526.

Phone: (219)535-7060. E-mail: dean@goshen.edu.



**Mennonite
Central
Committee**

21 South 12th Street
PO Box 500
Akron, PA 17501-0500

**ADDRESS SERVICE
REQUESTED**

PERIODICALS
POSTAGE PAID
AT AKRON, PA